

## Message Text

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ACTION EUR-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07 H-03 INR-10 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-10 PA-03 RSC-01 PRS-01 SPC-03 SS-15

USIA-15 ACDA-19 IO-15 EB-11 OMB-01 DRC-01 /144 W

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R 271719Z SEP 73

FM AMEMBASSY LONDON

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4295

INFO AMEMBASSY BONN

AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS

AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN

AMEMBASSY DUBLIN

AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE

AMEMBASSY LUXEMBOURG

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY ROME

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: UK, PINT

SUBJECT: LIBERAL PARTY ELECTORAL STRATEGY

REF: LONDON'S 10931

1. SUMMARY: AS THEIR POLITICAL FORTUNES IMPROVE, LIBERALS FIND THEMSELVES AT ODDS OVER VITAL QUESTIONS OF ELECTORAL STRATEGY. SHORT OF FUNDS AND ORGANIZATIONALLY WEAK, THEY ARE BEING FORCED TO MAKE SOME HARD CHOICES: WHETHER TO CONCENTRATE THEIR EFFORTS AGAINST LABOR OR AGAINST THE CONSERVATIVES, WHETHER TO FIGHT THE NEXT GENERAL ELECTION ON A BROAD OR NARROW FRONT, AND WHETHER TO SPELL OUT IN ADVANCE THEIR TERMS FOR PARTICIPATION IN A FUTURE GOVERNMENT

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SHOULD NO ONE PARTY MANAGE TO SECURE A CLEAR MAJORITY.

END SUMMARY.

2. RELUCTANTLY, AND IN SOME CONFUSION, LIBERALS ARE STARTING TO COME TO GRIPS WITH THE ELECTORAL STRATEGY IMPLICATIONS OF THEIR CURRENT REVIVAL. MORE THAN HALF THE DELEGATES TO LAST WEEK'S ANNUAL CONFERENCE (REFTEL) STAYED ON AFTER THE TELEVISION CAMERAS HAD GONE HOME TO DISCUSS HOW THEY SHOULD FIGHT THE NEXT GENERAL ELECTION AND WHAT THEY SHOULD DO IF, AS A RESULT OF THAT ELECTION, THEY FOUND THEMSELVES HOLDING THE BALANCE OF POWER IN THE NEXT PARLIAMENT.

3. MANY LIBERALS, INCLUDING MOST OF THE YOUNGER ONES AND THOSE COMMITTED TO "COMMUNITY POLITICS," WISH TO SEE THE LIBERAL PARTY BCOME A RADICAL, NON-SOCIALIST ALTERNATIVE TO THE LABOR PARTY. THEY ADVOCATE AN ALL-OUT ELECTORAL PUSH ON THE LEFT. THE PARTY LEADERSHIP IS PREPARED TO ENDORSE SUCH A DRIVE, AT LEAST IN PRINCIPLE, BUT IN PRACTICE PREFERS A MORE FLEXIBLE AND PRAGMATIC APPROACH. THE TWO PENDING BY-ELECTIONS, FOR EXAMPLE, WILL BE HELD IN CONSERVATIVE STRONGHOLDS WHERE A CAMPAIGN TO DISPLACE LABOR, EVEN IF SUCCESSFUL, WOULD ON ITS OWN STILL LEAVE THE LIBERALS IN SECOND PLACE. STRAW POLLS INDICATE THAT THE LIBERALS ARE CUTTING DEEPLY INTO THE CONSERVATIVE VOTE AND IN ONE OF THESE TWO RACES -- AT BERWICK-ON-TWEED -- STAND AN EXCELLENT CHANCE OF TAKING THE SEAT.

4. A SECOND POINT OF CONTENTION WITHIN THE PARTY IS WHETHER TO MOUNT A NARROW OR A BROAD FRONT CAMPAIGN IN THE NEXT GENERAL ELECTION, I.E., WHETHER TO CONCENTRATE THE PARTY'S LIMITED RESOURCES ON THE MOST WINNABLE SEATS AND LEAVE THE REST UNCONTESTED, OR WHETHER TO FIELD CANDIDATES IN AS MANY CONSTITUENCIES AS POSSIBLE. THE QUESTION OF MONEY ASIDE, THIS ISSUE BOILS DOWN TO A MATTER OF SELF-CONFIDENCE. TREVOR JONES -- APTLY KNOWN AS JONES THE VOTE -- REFUSES TO ACKNOWLEDGE THAT ANY SEAT IS UNWINNABLE IN BRITAIN TODAY. HE ARGUES THAT THE VERY ACT OF FIELDING A BROAD FRONT OF CANDIDATES WOULD ENHANCE THE PARTY'S LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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CREDIBILITY AS A SERIOUS CONTENDER FOR POWER AND THEREBY ATTRACT EVEN MORE VOTES THAN MIGHT OTHERWISE BE THE CASE. MORE CAUTIOUS AND SKEPTICAL LIBERALS FEAR SUCH A COURSE OF ACTION WOULD YIELD ONLY HUNDREDS OF FORFEITED DEPOSITS, PARTY BANKRUPTCY, AND ELECTORAL DISASTER. AT SOUTHPORT THE LIBERALS PUBLICLY COMMITTED THEMSELVES TO FIGHT 500 SEATS (OUT OF A TOTAL OF 635), BUT ONLY TWO HUNDRED CANDIDATES

HAVE THUS FAR BEEN SELECTED.

5. RELATED TO THIS ISSUE IS YET A THIRD QUESTION IN  
DISPUTE -- WHAT TO DO IF LIBERALS GAIN THE BALANCE  
OF POWER. JOHN PARDOE, LIBERAL MP, PUBLISHED AN  
ARTICLE SHORTLY BEFORE THE ANNUAL CONFERENCE IN WHICH  
HE ARGUED THAT THE PARTY OWED IT TO THE ELECTORATE  
TO INDICATE IN ADVANCE WHAT IT WOULD DO IN SUCH A  
SITUATION. TO THIS END, HE INTRODUCED A MOTION AT

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THE CONFERENCE CALLING UPON THE PARTY SIMPLY TO  
CONSIDER THE QUESTION. DESPITE THE MODESTY OF HIS

PROPOSAL, PARDOE DREW DOWN THE WRATH OF THE FORMIDABLE CYRIL SMITH, WHO DENOUNCED ANY WORD OR ACTION THAT COULD POSSIBLY BE INTERPRETED TO SUGGEST THAT THE LIBERALS MIGHT EVER BE INTERESTED IN FORMING A COALITION WITH EITHER OF THE TWO MAJOR PARTIES. AFTER A TUMULTUOUS DEBATE AND BY A VERY QUESTIONABLE VOTE, PARDOE'S MOTION WAS NARROWLY PASSED.

6. PARDOE SUBSEQUENTLY CONFIDED TO EMBOFF THAT HIS PRIMARY AIM IN FORCING A PARTY DISCUSSION ON THIS QUESTION WAS TO AVOID A POST-ELECTION SPLIT IN THE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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RANKS OF THE NEWLY-ELECTED LIBERAL PARLIAMENTARY DELEGATION. IF THE LIBERAL PARTY COULD AGREE IN ADVANCE ON THE MINIMUM TERMS IT WOULD LAY DOWN FOR PARTICIPATION IN GOVERNMENT, INDIVIDUAL LIBERAL MPS WOULD BE BETTER FORTIFIED TO WITHSTAND BLANDISHMENTS FROM EITHER OF THE OTHER PARTIES.

7. NONE OF THESE ELECTORAL QUESTIONS WAS REALLY SETTLED AT SOUTHPORT AND ALL OF THEM WILL CONTINUE TO OCCUPY LIBERAL STRATEGISTS FOR THE FORESEEABLE FUTURE, WAXING AND WANING IN INTENSITY ACCORDING TO THE FLUCTUATING FORTUNES OF THE PARTY.

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